

IF THIS BE TREASON, MAKE THE MOST OF IT

THE proud and picturesque, historic and hospitable little community of Charlestown—which should be set aside as a government reservation by way of proof for future generations that the Old South really existed outside the novels of Thomas Nelson Page—was astir at dawn on the morning of Saturday, April 22.

Creaking green shutters were swung out and backward against red brick walls to admit the first rays of the sun, just beginning to glow above the haze-enveloped Blue Ridge mountains, five miles to the east, and for a few moments the bedroom occupants stood beside the opened windows, the better to dispel the vestiges of sleep through inhalations of the dewy tonic freshness of the surrounding Shenandoah Valley. Shortly thereafter they began stepping from the wide, white-pillared Colonial porches to the sidewalks.

All were bound for the same destination, the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad station. Arriving there, they grouped themselves in pairs, trios and quartets, and began discussion of the reason for their early rendezvous.

Charlestown was to become famous again. It gathered from bits of conversation exchanged. It was sixty-three years ago that the country first learned all about Charlestown, they told one another—when old John Brown was marched in from Harper's Ferry, eight miles away, tried in the Jefferson County "cathouse," and then taken over to Colonel

West Virginia Comes Again to the Fore With an Amazing Mixture of Chain Gangs, Baseball, Mine Feuds and "Southern Hospitality," Plus the Recurring Question, Who Owns This State?

By GILMAN PARKER

few had possessed the temerity to brave getting into "biled shirts" and starched collars. These, for the most part, were replaced by denim—with a liberal sprinkling of khaki and "o. d." observable. To every left coat lapel had been pinned a small pink badge, on which appeared the inscription: "United Mine Workers of America—Defendant." Interspersed among the miners were several women, each came along determinedly to see that "her man" was going to get a square deal. Some held babes in their arms or had children of slightly more advanced age clinging tightly to their skirts.

There were some two hundred of the miners. So far as the residents of Charlestown could discern, there were no machine guns, rifles or other accessories of warfare observable. In fact, the only weapon to be seen among these men—painted in crimson colors as murderers, conspirators and traitors by the coal operators and their official allies of the prosecution—was a very small popgun in the hands of an almost equally small boy, who cried loudly to his mother that it was broken and wouldn't pop any more.

Standing on the platform and herding closely together, the newcomers offered an in-



Charlestown versus "Murderers, Conspirators and Traitors," Bill Blizzard, of the latter team and chief defendant, at the bat. Hostile incident to a treason trial which was missing in the days of Aaron Burr and John Brown

do," he said in a voice filled with excitement, "is to be nice to us!"

Five minutes later the miners were holding a mass meeting in front of the Palm Hotel, giving vent to their best oratory and the glories of Charlestown and adopting resolutions praising every one from the Mayor down to the lowliest bootblack.

Such was the arrival of the miners in Charlestown.

Next morning, at about the same time, the citizens' committee again went to the railroad station, on this occasion to welcome the "Prosecutor's Special," paid for, it was openly charged later, by the money of the coal operators. But at this time Charlestown had not taken any side in the matter; it had an open mind, and it was prepared to greet all those interested impartially.

The train pulled in and much the same scene of the previous morning was enacted as it disgorged its passengers. Most of these, numbering several hundred, were witnesses for the prosecution, many of them much like the miners as to type, but generally better dressed. Scattered among them was a liberal admixture of men wearing deputy sheriff's badges, private detectives and mine guards. One smaller group was composed of neatly attired men of the sort one sees every day in Wall Street—the coal operators and the counsel for the state.

Most of the passengers of the "Prosecutor's Special" were armed, it was revealed.

mentally with West Virginia.

When the miner of the Palm Hotel announced the discovery that there actually were in existence some people who wanted to "be nice" to him and his fellows, he disclosed far more than volumes of heated diatribe could have done, and with a wealth of pathos overshadowing the humor of his comment, that the miners of West Virginia are not accustomed to receiving treatment involving niceties in the coalpit regions of the state.

And when the coal operators and their hand-picked counsel technically representing the People of West Virginia made their first appearance in such a community as Charlestown—which cherishes its Old South traditions as second only to its reverence for the old-fashioned gospel—dangling before them a white Baptist preacher and a negro at the end of a dog chain, they disclosed far more than additional volumes could have done, not only an almost incredible stupidity and lack of perception, but also something of what is meant by the charge of the miners that the mine owners are maintaining a privately owned government in West Virginia.

The writer went to Charlestown with no prejudices, determined to inquire fairly and impartially into the charge and the evidence backing it, that the miners in their now historic "March on Logan and Mingo" committed treason against the State of West Virginia—that they plotted the overturn of the sovereignty of the state, at least in the counties where the march and the "Battle of Blair Mountain" occurred, and that with this in mind they levied war against the state and its people. He left Charlestown nine days later, completely convinced that not only was the "March on Logan and Mingo" not directed



John Brown, whose plot to free the slaves by force of negro insurrection, led to his death on the gallows after thirteen of his band had been shot by Federal troops in seige at Harper's Ferry

The magic letter in American treason trials is B. First Burr, then Brown, and now Bill Blizzard

teresting study in psychology. Because of the copious propaganda they had been reading, the citizens of Charlestown had expected to be met by scowls, frowns and other facial indications of hostile feeling. Instead they found their inspection returned by one in which a somewhat bewildered and almost childish curiosity was the chief expression manifested. This was alloyed, however, by an alert and suspicious apprehension, which grew more pronounced when the leaders of the Charlestown delegation stepped forward and began addressing the visitors.

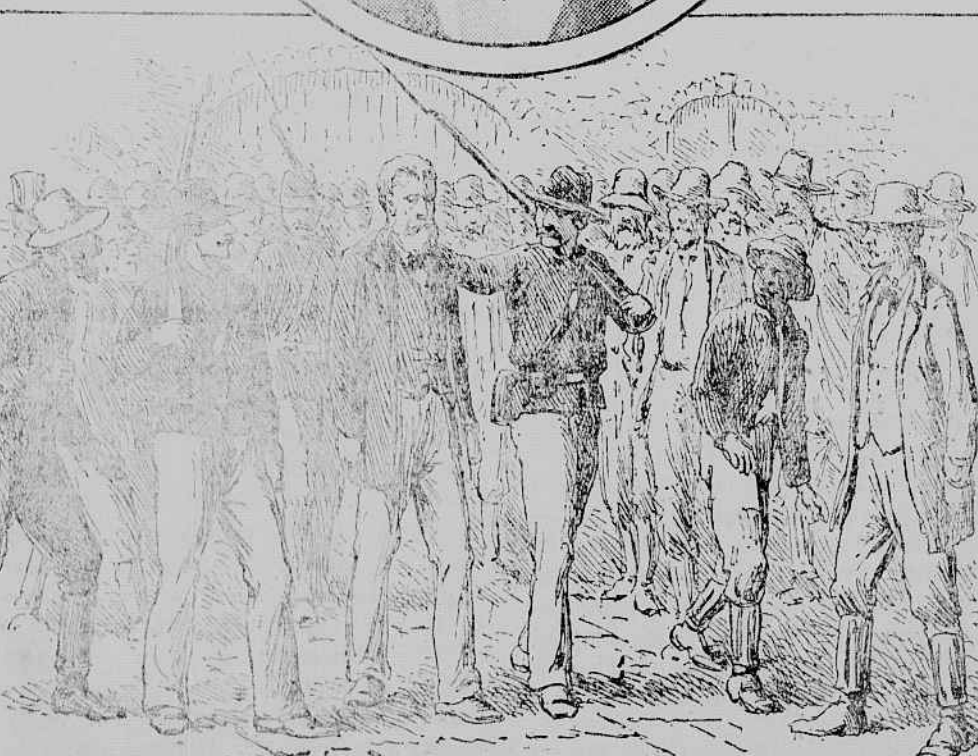
The speaker said some nice things, that the miners were most welcome in Charlestown, that they must make themselves right at home during their stay, that a number of preparations had been made to make their visit a pleasant one, but that if these proved insufficient they must not hesitate to tell the citizens' committee, and so on. The head of the Charlestown women's club had prepared another pleasing little speech. But it was never delivered.

Scarcely waiting for the first speaker to conclude, and with no sign of applause, the miners broke in a body from the platform and made off as rapidly as they could toward the one place they knew about in Charlestown, the place they had been ordered to go to immediately on their arrival—the Palm Hotel in Washington Street, chosen for them by their leaders as the "defense headquarters." Getting there with sighs of relief, they sat down to debate at length the profound mystery of the speech and why the whole town had turned



Aaron Burr, against whom a charge of treason grew out of his project to detach from the young American government the territory west of the Alleghenies and there found a separate state

Jefferson County Court, West Virginia, scene of the miners' treason trial, and of John Brown's



The arrest of John Brown for treason, Harper's Ferry, sixty-three years ago

It was another trap on the part of the coal operators, some of them argued, a dark, deep-laid plot aiming to put the miners in a bad light or get them in trouble. Others among them thought Charlestown possessed a community sense of humor, and that its citizens were "trying to make a joke on us." A still larger number "couldn't figger it out nohow, makin' all that fuss about folks like us." They

welcome, they all agreed, and the harder they tried to solve it the deeper the mystery grew.

Finally, in a momentary silence broken only by the sound of cut plug in process of mastication, a lanky, rangy mountaineer-miner leaped to his feet.

"Reckon Ah've got it," he announced triumphantly. Every eye was on him for an explanation.

some of them with two pistols apiece, and by the legal permission of the state. They displayed none of the wonderment shown by the miners on their first glimpse of their new surroundings, but merely a perfunctory interest. Their attitude was one of self-assurance, even boldness.

The citizens' committee pressed forward, ready to present its address—then halted, agitated and indignant. For descending from one of the coaches to the platform there appeared nine shabbily-clad men, miner-defendants who had been unable to furnish bail after being taken into custody following the return in the mining counties of the indictments against them. All but the ninth prisoner were handcuffed two by two, and a long chain, of the sort used for holding bloodhounds in leash, linked all the sets of handcuffs together.

Two of the prisoners thus handcuffed in pair were a white man and a negro. Another pair was composed of a man claiming to be an ordained Baptist preacher and his son. Walking behind the prisoners, and holding the nether end of the chain, was an armed deputy sheriff. Appearing directly before the dumb-founded committee members with his charges, the deputy marched them on into the street near by and thence to the Jefferson County jail.

The operators and the sovereignty of the State of West Virginia had arrived in Charlestown.

The writer has exhausted considerable of the space allotted to him for this article in presenting the foregoing incidents of the Charlestown trials because, as a newspaperman sent there to report the proceedings until they were well under way, they appeal to him more than anything else that he saw or heard

against the sovereignty of the state, but that it actually was on behalf of it—to get the state to try the experiment of going into the sovereignty business on its own hook and compete a bit with the super-sovereignty established by the coal operators.

Before going into the evidence and underlying causes it might be well to present three incidents reflecting the trend of public opinion in Charlestown on the subject, inasmuch as it is a thoroughly American community and has formed its views from first-hand information.

A week after the arrival of the miners, on the following Saturday morning, the town's "best people" crowded into the faded old rose courtroom as a sort of social event, their attendance made possible for the first time by a ruling excluding the hundreds of defendants and witnesses until needed individually. They heard the chief witness of the day, a union miner turned state's evidence, declare that he had led one of the divisions of the miners on the march, and that the chief object of the latter had been "to kill Sheriff Don Chafin of Logan County and his deputies, in order to liberate the union men jailed in Logan and Mingo and then unionize the two counties." They heard the same witness, under cross-examination a little later, admit that he had spent thirty-one days in jail a few weeks after the march on a charge of having obtained \$600 from several of the union locals on a pretext of relieving destitution among miners' families. They heard the prosecution attorneys denounce the miner defendants in fiery oratory as "murderers, conspirators and traitors," particularly William Blizzard, the youthful president of a union sub-district, who was the first defendant placed on trial, and who possesses far more of the appearance of a half-back on a university football team than that of an official of a coal miners' organization.

Three hours later the same distinguished residents of Charlestown sat about a baseball diamond on the outskirts of the town and cheered with true Polo Grounds enthusiasm as a team composed of Mr. Blizzard and eight of his fellow "murderers, conspirators and traitors" defeated the home team—in a game for the benefit of the local hospital—by the score of 7 to 3.

The second episode illustrative of Charlestown conclusions occurred at the end of the following week, when the citizens got up a community entertainment. All the defendants attended, by invitation, but the presence of the prosecution's witnesses was not requested.